

Improving Public Outreach and Education For Natural Community Conservation Planning

A Report Prepared for:

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Executive Summary

Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) is a collaborative regional planning tool through which local jurisdictions and the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG or the Department) can devise strategies to balance development needs with threatened and endangered species conservation. It is a process that requires strategic communication throughout--from initiation, through planning, and on indefinitely into implementation. DFG recognizes this need and commissioned this study to explore improving outreach and education for NCCP.

The results of this study show that the core participants surveyed do not feel that their visions of the goal of DFG's NCCP education and outreach have come very close to being achieved. In order to improve outreach and education, a strategy must be outlined that takes into account how NCCP evolves over time and how this influences the different types of outreach and education needed in the different phases of the process. Formation of an outreach and education plan should strategically address various priority audiences at different points in the NCCP process-focusing on core participants in the planning process and the general public as implementation and acquisition ensue. This survey attempted to elicit respondents' perspectives on the following information:

- levels of knowledge of the NCCP process
- DFG's priority target audiences
- DFG outreach and education priority goals
- the most effective methods to reach target audiences

Additional results from this assessment include specific ideas from the respondents on how DFG can improve outreach and education, an inventory of existing outreach and education activities, as well as ideas for improving outreach and education efforts for the broad group of participants involved in the NCCP process.

Introduction

Natural Community Conservation Planning is a tool for balancing conservation of natural landscapes and sensitive species with new land uses. It provides a forum for communication among stakeholders whereby a plan can be developed that addresses their interests. The result of this planning is an implementation strategy for protection of biological diversity at an ecosystem scale, while allowing for compatible economic development.

All NCCP plans approved to date were designed for city and county government land use authority, but NCCP is also applicable to other situations and applicants. This report focuses on Southern California, and in particular San Diego County, to allow for lessons learned from one of the regions furthest along in application of the NCCP process to be applied proactively in any future context. In other areas of California, the NCCP approach is poorly understood and not many regions (with the exception of Placer County) are exploring how it is relevant to their community's vision of a balance between conservation and development. The Department believes that engaging the public in an open process that demonstrates the relevance of NCCP to their lives will help in expanding the application of NCCP to new areas throughout California.

An NCCP requires intensive communication between all stakeholders in order for planning to result in a mutually agreeable outcome. Initially the planning process involves the lead jurisdictions and the interest groups (including state and federal agencies) that have a stake in the outcome of regional planning. The first major effort to create NCCP plans has been in five Southern California counties. Outreach during the planning phase was a major component of the DFG strategy from the beginning (Ron Rempel, DFG Deputy Director, personal communication). Initially, outreach and education about the process involved communicating to the highest levels of local government why this collaborative, regional approach would lead to solutions for endangered species conflicts at the local level. In addition to personal contacts with core participants, the Department produced numerous newsletters, brochures, and

presentations. A web page was initiated on the California Resources Agency's CERES web site (www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp). All these activities and products helped DFG and its partners initiate subarea plans in most jurisdictions, and complete plans in Orange and San Diego counties by 1997. With six NCCP plans approved by 1999, the program broadened its focus to include implementation and habitat management, and the outreach and education component of the process became less of a priority than it was initially.

Understanding how a NCCP process evolves is critical to the formation of an effective outreach and education plan. DFG needs to understand why target audience priorities and goal priorities for NCCP outreach and education change over time and how best to manage the multiplicity of needs within this process. This research is designed to explore some of the perspectives of many in-depth participants in the NCCP process. The participants are from diverse interest groups (including local, state and federal government, business interests, and non-profit advocacy interests). The ideas captured herein from the respondents represent the diversity of the values and priorities that makes a collaborative regional preserve planning process, such as NCCP, a challenge to all involved.

Project Goal

The goal of this research project was to record the perspectives of core participants, and elicit ideas on how to improve outreach and education efforts for the NCCP program.

Methodology

The methods used to achieve the goal of this project involved conducting a survey and focused interviews.

The Survey

A survey entitled "An Exploratory Survey For Improving Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) Public Outreach and Education" was first trial tested

within DFG's Habitat Conservation Planning Branch. After being refined, the survey was sent out to approximately eighty (80) stakeholders in the NCCP process (copies of the survey are available upon request). The selection of these specific stakeholders was non-random and was guided by consultations with the NCCP Program Manager. This non-random selection of in-depth participants was designed to explore the ideas of the many experts involved in NCCP work.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of people contacted (42 of 80) to fill out the survey responded. All participants were clustered into one of five stakeholder groups to allow comparison of responses across groups. The five groups and the number of participants that responded to the survey from each group were:

Federal and State Government (11)

Local Government (10)

Non-profit / Advocacy / Environmental Organization (13)

Business Organization (5)

Academically Affiliated (3)

The Interviews

Focus interviews were conducted with twelve (12) participants in the NCCP process, most of who are in-depth participants, to follow-up their responses on the survey and gather more in-depth feedback from them on improving outreach and education for NCCP. The breakdown of interviews for the five groups was:

Federal and State Government (1)

Local Government (3)

Non-profit / Advocacy / Environmental Organization (6)

Business Organization (1)

Academically Affiliated (1)

These one-on-one opportunities to openly discuss the audience and goal prioritization components of the survey proved to be invaluable to understanding important distinctions in people's concepts of outreach and education. These inquiries highlighted the importance of understanding the changing role of outreach in the NCCP

process from initiation through implementation and finally for management of the preserve systems. The interviews also provided the opportunity to clarify the respondent's vision, ideas, and the relationship between their organization's role and the Department's.

Results & Discussion

Survey Results¹ & Analysis¹

The Present Situation

As can be seen in Table 1, no group thinks that DFG's NCCP outreach and education program is coming "very close" to achieving their vision. Many of the respondents who are in-depth participants were unaware that the Department was involved in any NCCP outreach and education efforts (16 of 42). Together, these two observations characterize the present outreach and education efforts of DFG as falling short of achieving the desired outcome of increasing people's awareness of the NCCP effort and its relevance to their quality of life.

¹Only the most salient results from the survey are presented in this section to underscore the recommendations from the 42 responses received. The complete results of the survey are available at www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp.

Table 1: Achieving Respondents’ Visions for DFG Outreach and Education²

Question 7: To what extent have past efforts come close to achieving your vision of the goal of DFG’s NCCP education and outreach?

Cluster Group	Very Close	Somewhat close	Not very close
Federal / State	-	1	7
Local Government	-	2	5
Non-profit	-	2	9
Business	-	1	3
Academic	-	1	1
Total	0	7	25

Note: Ten respondents chose not to answer this question.

II. The Respondents’ Priorities

When looked at collectively, the results from the survey questions that addressed the respondents’ priorities for DFG audience targets, goals, and methods show the following.

- The general public is rated the least knowledgeable
- The general public is one of the highest priority audiences
- Getting the public to understand the need for NCCP is a highly rated goal
- The most effective methods for outreach are those that will most easily reach the general public (i.e. the media)

This information reveals a clear need to improve outreach and education targeted at the general public with a “campaign style” approach that involves the media (television and news releases). A detailed analysis of these survey results is available upon request or can be accessed on the internet at the following web site: www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp.

²This question replies upon the answer to question 4 in the survey. See Figure 3 in Appendix 3 for analysis of priority goal rankings for DFG outreach and education. The complete results of the survey are available at www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp

III. Specific Ideas for DFG

Respondents were asked for specific ideas on how DFG can improve NCCP outreach and education. The open-ended answers elicited from the respondents included many valuable ideas. Many respondents commented on how important outreach and education is to the success of the NCCP approach. Many also pointed out the need for a strategic outreach plan that involves partnerships throughout the diverse group of core participants and non-participants. Five (5) recommendations focused on the need for strategic planning for effective outreach and education. Some of the most frequently mentioned recommendations are summarized below.

Increased DFG Staffing and Funding

The most frequently mentioned idea (nine(9) times) for improving DFG outreach and education focused on increased staffing and funding to implement a strategic program. The role that DFG plays in the NCCP process as a bridge builder between the diverse groups of stakeholders was seen as invaluable to the success of the endeavor. Some of the specific ideas relating to increased DFG staffing and funding included:

- Create a position that will specifically look after education issues (and provide access to resources, staff, and money).
- Define the target audiences and recognize that the audiences are going to be different in the planning (stakeholders focus) versus implementation phases (general public focus for ballot votes).
- Convene a team to develop a strategy and seek professional outreach help and guidance so as to convey a simple and clear message to the general public.
- Send a team of two to three people to present talks on NCCP in selected forums such as civic organizations like the League of California Cities, Association of Environmental Planners, California County Supervisors Association, Building Industry Associations, and Statewide Land Trust meetings. Also focus presentations on key entities within local jurisdictions such as County Board of Supervisors, Planning Commissions, and City Councils.

Partnership Formation

Forming partnerships to improve outreach and education was also mentioned frequently (seven (7) recommendations). Some of the specific ideas included:

- Get involved and provide financial assistance to the locally initiated efforts (such as the MSCP Outreach Committee in San Diego County).
- Identify and partner with key stakeholders / potential participants / influential non-governmental organizations to increase the reach of DFG's own capabilities.
- Partner with educational organizations (San Diego State University, San Diego Natural History Museum, University of California schools, etc.) that can deliver the message to their constituencies.
- Seek media coverage of partnerships and achievements and bring this attention before the legislature to continue to receive support and money for NCCP.

Six (6) recommendations focused on increasing the number of press releases through communication with the media about NCCP preserve days, land acquisitions, and milestone achievements.

Other Important Media for Outreach and Education

The need to reach elected officials, students, children and their parents through a broad range of media (public meetings / workshops / pamphlets / television and videos / web site) was mentioned many times. Some of the specific ideas relating to this broad range of outreach and education media included:

- Hold workshops with potential stakeholders. Emphasize on-the-ground successes by starting events at NCCP preserves.
- Make individual or small group presentations to local agencies and large landowners and provide them with a pamphlet answering frequently asked questions (FAQs).
- Improve the DFG web site to provide more NCCP information that demonstrates the relevance of the program (maps of preserve system and biological data) and include HabiTrack (GIS program that tracks habitat protected versus habitat developed) so that the NCCP work relates to its successes.

Within DFG

The survey respondents focused attention on the DFG's role and opportunities that the Department has to improve its outreach and education:

- Improve internal communication within DFG about NCCP and its relevance to areas throughout the state.
- Incorporate outreach and education into everyone's workplan (lots of creative ideas out there) and report back on what they have done. Continue to perform needs assessments so that you can evaluate how the program is or is not working.
- Get DFG Director involved in promoting NCCP programs and interacting with local stakeholders more frequently.

IV. Specific Ideas for NCCP Participants

Respondents were asked for their specific ideas on how NCCP participants can improve outreach and education. Once again, strategic planning was a frequent recommendation with eight (8) occurrences. The need for DFG to act as a leader to focus the direction and funding to implement outreach was also mentioned by multiple respondents. Some of the most frequently recommended ideas for improving outreach and education on the part of NCCP participants were:

Partnerships

The most frequent recommendation was to form partnerships (ten (10) responses). The Department of Fish and Game and the San Diego Natural History Museum have recently developed a partnership to work on a mutual goal of improving people's understanding of the natural communities in which we live. Such partnerships were recommended for other organizations too, such as between the permit recipients and their local interest groups. Some of the proposed partnerships included:

- Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation and the San Diego Zoological Society could be convinced to play more of a role in NCCP outreach and education.
- DFG and the San Diego State University Biological Field Stations could collaborate and use the powerful combination of the preserves and student interest to serve as a focus for public outreach and education.

Strategy

Multiple approaches to improving participant involvement were mentioned by respondents-many of which pointed out the distinction between planning and implementation phases of the NCCP process. Here are some of the recommendations:

- Use a two-pronged approach whereby 1) a “campaign-based” education process regarding the benefits of regional conservation planning is used to get popular support for money for bonds and long-term management of the preserve systems; and 2) strategic outreach efforts with current and potential stakeholders and supporters.
- The NCCP process is too long and diffuse for the general public to keep focused on. Make the process clear and present results / tracking so that it can be compared to alternatives. Publicize land purchases that provide conservation and public access that are the corner stones of the program.

V. Inventory of Present Activities

Respondents were asked to tell us about ongoing outreach and education efforts (See Table 2). The efforts involve many small projects and very little comprehensive strategy to address large regions (with the exception of the MSCP Outreach Committee in San Diego). In the process of conducting this research, The Naturelands Project, was discussed. This project, which tried to bring the many core interest groups together in one unified outreach and education effort in San Diego, has unfortunately not been implemented.

Table 2: Inventory of Ongoing or In-Process NCCP Outreach

Stakeholder, Group, or Individual	Activity or Product
California Department of Fish and Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technical oversight of NCCP process• Responses to: media, public, graduate students, conference presentations, press releases, presentations to interest groups, reports to the legislature• Web site (http://ceres.ca.gov/CRA/NCCP)• “Outdoor California” magazine• A pamphlet entitled “A Partnership for Conservation NCCP 1991-1998”
San Diego County MSCP Outreach Committee (a sub-committee of the Habitat and Management Technical Committee)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two videos produced on San Diego’s MSCP (one runs on local cable network CTN)• MSCP Newsletter• News releases• Web sites with FAQs (http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/cnty/cntydepts/landuse/parks/navbuttons/faq.html#MSCP_faq)• San Diego’s MSCP annual report is on line• Training materials (index card) for training staff• Booths (w/ display) for Earth Day• Two brochures--one for biodiversity and another for children (both are in production)• Developed a speakers bureau• Volunteer patrols• MSCP walks and talks• Flyers on habitat types• Stickers / pins for habitat types of San Diego• Pamphlet for all 85 species covered in the MSCP (in production)

SANDAG (elected officials from the 18 cities of San Diego County)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web site (http://www.sandag.cog.ca.us/projects/regional_planning/environment.html) • Video, slide show, and a pamphlet on NCCP • One large and one small display
City of San Diego	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal education program for project processing • Display for Earth Day
Permit Recipients (jurisdictions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public meetings • Public service announcements (County of San Diego and Rancho Palos Verdes)
The Nature Conservancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Naturelands Project (discontinued) • A pamphlet entitled “A Partnership for Conservation NCCP 1991-1998” • Magazine articles • Top-line poll information for San Diego
The Nature Reserve of Orange County (The Nature Conservancy on behalf of the Irvine Company)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37,000 acres of managed reserve lands with regulated access and visitor programs • 130 volunteers who convey information while working on the reserve • Pamphlet entitled “Living Close to Nature” • Pamphlet entitled “Orange County Wild” (in production) • Outdoor science program for seventh graders implemented jointly with Orange County Board of Education with the Irvine Unified School District and UCI)
Sempra Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In house training booklet on species for their staff to be familiar with while maintaining their infrastructure
National Wildlife Federation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary report “Public Participation in Habitat Conservation Planning” Copies Available for \$35 from: Dr. Steven Yaffee, School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, 48109-1115
San Diego Natural History Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Agreement with DFG (in progress) • Hikes on NCCP preserve lands in San Diego County • Display for the museum that can travel
KPBS Radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invites for NCCP discussions
San Diego Union Tribune and the San Diego Daily Transcript	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports when “milestones” have been achieved or when controversial events take place
Orange County Register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles

Los Angeles Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Articles
Local TV Stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invites for NCCP discussions
San Diego Zoological Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Previously engaged in TV shows relevant to NCCP (w/ TNC) Membership mailing about San Diego's unique habitats and their role in conserving them
Sierra Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressed interest in helping to publicize successes
Bureau of Land Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PowerPoint presentations ranging from talks to the BIA to Earth Warrior
Riverside County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smart growth from county to local jurisdictions" pamphlet-coordinated planning effort captured in a pamphlet about partnering from federal to state to regional level and with various interest groups to do coordinated regional planning
Conservation Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings and e-mail lists

Conclusion

The results show that the present outreach and education efforts of DFG are falling short of achieving the desired outcome of increasing people's awareness of the NCCP effort. There is still a great need for improving outreach and education.

Respondents recognize that the stage of the NCCP process greatly influences the priority audiences and goals. For example, in the initiation and planning stages of NCCP, the lead jurisdiction and relevant interest groups are priority audiences for outreach and education about the process. These groups are the lead plan developers who must have intimate knowledge and understanding of the NCCP process in order to successfully negotiate and complete a plan. Outreach focused on the general public is clearly not as important at this stage. In fact, respondents believe improving the general public's participation in the planning phase (including providing access to NCCP-related materials such as maps, species information, scientific data, etc.) should not be a high priority goal for DFG. The general public is an important audience, but only to inform them of the benefits of NCCP and how this influences their quality of life (congestion, smart growth, open space, project streamlining, etc.).

Further on in the process, when the plan has been approved and must now be implemented, the need for the general public to understand the benefits of NCCP is much more important than in the initial stages of the process. The priority for outreach and education has shifted away from the core participants and onto the general public in areas where plans have reached the implementation stage. For example, in the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP) in San Diego, public support is critical for a local funding source to be established (as required in the Implementation Agreement). The general public may be required to vote on a public funding initiative necessary to acquire, manage, and monitor land within the regional preserve system. In the MSCP, land acquisition for the preserve system and monitoring are in full swing, and publicly supported funding must be secured in order for the plans to be carried out effectively. Many of the respondents are familiar with the MSCP program now in the implementation phase and how it is still seeking a regional funding source. Thus, respondents indicated that educating the general public through news releases, web sites, and television (the media most effective in reaching the public) should be the highest priority goal. It is important to take into consideration the point in the NCCP process from which most of the respondents' priorities are coming from-not all regions might prioritize the general public and the use of media as their priority audience and medium through which to do outreach and education. For example, a region just beginning to explore the possibility of applying NCCP would most likely need to focus on key participants in order to begin the planning process with diverse, well informed stakeholders at the table.

The most frequently suggested idea for both DFG and other NCCP participants was to form partnerships for outreach and education. There are a few examples of DFG outreach partnerships. DFG and The Nature Conservancy collaborated on a NCCP brochure entitled "A Partnership for Conservation: NCCP 1991-1998". DFG is partnering with the San Diego Natural History Museum to work toward the common goal of improving people's understanding of the natural communities in which we live. However, there are many more opportunities for such partnerships as evidenced by the list of existing efforts by various interest groups. Greater partnering on these efforts would reach a wider audience with a more diverse message and allow for more effective use of limited outreach and education funds.

Recommendations

DFG and its partners need to embrace outreach and education as integral to the process of developing and implementing NCCP plans. Outreach and education should be considered necessary “infrastructure” for the process, just as roads, sewers, and utilities are infrastructure supporting our communities. Without a concerted commitment to integrate outreach and education into all phases of the process, DFG and its partners are destined to continually struggle with uninformed and misinformed constituents creating delays, barriers, and potentially “train wrecks” in the process.

In order to focus limited resources, a dual-pronged approach would be effective whereby outreach and education focuses on:

- the core stakeholders in the initiation and planning stages; and
- the general public throughout the process, but with emphasis in the implementation stage.

DFG should address the need to improve outreach and education for NCCP through the following main avenues of effort:

- “Branding” - To increase effectiveness, a “campaign” type of educational process regarding the benefits of regional conservation planning would be much better received. The title “Natural Community Conservation Planning” is lengthy and cumbersome, and the more easily used acronym, NCCP, is probably only recognized by core participants. A new, shorter name or catch phrase would be more likely to get people’s attention and garner popular support for conservation planning, open space protection, and funding for long-term management needs. Applying this approach might benefit from previous research and planning conducted for the Naturelands project.
- Partnering - DFG should use the San Diego Natural History Museum partnership model to work with many other organizations. DFG should encourage and facilitate other entities to form partnerships.
- Grant funding - Local jurisdictions and non-profit partners could be encouraged to submit grant proposals for outreach and education programs through DFG’s Local

Assistance Grants program. Federal and foundation financial support may also be available from a variety of sources. DFG could use available funding to contract for outreach and education from outside sources.

- Staffing - NCCP staffing could be supplemented with a position responsible for outreach and education. Unless an existing position is redirected, a Budget Change Proposal must be approved to add positions to DFG.
- Required component - Lastly, a contractual obligation for outreach and education should be included in all future Planning Agreements and Implementation Agreements. This will assure that education and outreach become integral “infrastructure” throughout the NCCP process, and the regional conservation planning message reaches stakeholders and the general public in all future endeavors.